

September 27, 2026

# *Marion* Weekly Update

Sermon "Bring the Receipts" Acts 19:11-20

Do you keep receipts? Many of us do. We do it for our own protection most times. Receipts are just evidence. If we purchase something and are questioned about theft the receipt proves we bought it. If we have to return or exchange something the receipt proves that we bought it from the store and aren't asking them to make good on someone else's product. Receipts equal evidence.

This morning we're going to see how this factors into faith with a not too often used story. The seven sons of Sceva.

The before and after of this story are important. Paul had made a name for himself through signs and wonders. Enough so that people began imitating him. These sons of a Jewish priest were among them.

After the incident Paul's power was highlighted as authentic to the point that quiet believers became more bold in sharing their faith. On the other side nonbelievers who were practicing sorcery and such were afraid and abandoned their practice.

So what was this incident?

These brothers thought they could impersonate a genuine Spirit filled minister...like Paul. I imagine they had studied Paul. What words did he use? What hand gestures did he make? And they thought they had him figured out. So I see them going to a possessed man's house with confidence, likely arrogance, and strutting in to make the kind of name that might bring some financial gain.

I see them entering and reciting their words expecting the man to crumble under their authority. Then I see the man pause, exhale, and ask them "are you finished?" At which point he does a mic drop moment. "I know Jesus and Paul, but I have no idea who you chumps are." Then he gives these sons a thrashing of a lifetime and sends them "naked and bleeding" out of the house. Embarrassed. Defeated. A lesson to posers everywhere.

I was reminded of this story by a British comedian named Jimmy Carr. I wouldn't recommend looking him up for a full routine as he's got colorful language and tackles some inappropriate material. That said, the clip I'm referencing was none of that.

He engages his audience in his shows and often has genuinely kind interactions. He also dispenses some impressive insight. In this clip he is giving advice about success.

The advice is that while talent is good, you can have less talent mixed with hard work and putting in the effort that will give more success, fulfillment, and results than talent alone. Not bad advice. It was the statement that followed that made me think of this story in Acts.

He said that when we put in the work, we have the receipts. We have the evidence, the body of experience and work, that tells others we can deliver the goods. Receipts are everything.

That was the problem of these sons. They didn't have the receipts. They hadn't put in the work. They hadn't fully given themselves over to faith. Likely their motives were off point. They

hadn't committed to ministry and building a connection with the Holy Spirit. They hadn't sacrificed and given up themselves for their faith and for ministry.

Paul had. He had the receipts.

This is something we need to get focused on again. Honest self-reflection and asking that question. "Do I have the receipts".

In this world there are practices and claims that we can verify like the sons did...or didn't. They are proven in real time with definitive results. It's one of the things I love about martial arts. Lots of folks can talk a good game. But those who know also know that we can be open to one another, hear one another out, and converse because at the end of the day the truth of the words come to light the second we step on the mat. That puts everything to rest because there's nowhere to hide.

It's like if I told you I could slam dunk a basketball from the foul line. You could immediately ask me to head over to the gym, grab a basketball and do it. Immediately you'd have verification one way or the other. I can or I can't, and if I try to weasel out by making a million excuses you still have your answer.

Unfortunately in our world and the world of faith things aren't so clear. They aren't so cut and dried. With technology people can fake "receipts". Phony degrees and misrepresented experience combined with hidden skeletons can make someone unqualified look very reliable. We also live in a world where what counts as a receipt is sketchy. Our world is very comfortable rejecting actual evidence in favor of opinions that make us comfortable or are convenient. People select their own reality and facts.

What that means, and I've had this happen, is that you could put genuine proof or verification of something in front of someone and they will tell you they don't believe it. They reject it.

Why? If we're honest it's because we're talking about belief. We all have beliefs that give us comfort. Sometimes they even ease our conscience by assuring us that something wrong isn't actually that bad or might even be right. If we embrace fact to the opposite now we have to do some deep work in our souls and lives. We might have to do away with some ease, pride, feelings of being "better than", excuses to not give of ourselves, and more. We might have to get more gritty about living like the Jesus of the gospels and not the Jesus of pop culture.

If it makes us feel good we want to believe it. That's human.

I shared that I sat and listened to an evangelist a month ago for a few hours. I wrote down the things that sounded off to check them out. I wanted the receipts to know if I was learning something or if I'd be repeating nonsense should I share what I heard. While I was writing other pastors were bobble heading just smiling and nodding and drinking it in.

Unfortunately I found about 80% of what was said to be false, debunked, misleading, or misrepresenting information. I spoke with a couple pastors later and shared this. One response was that maybe he was just trying to bring us out emotionally.

What?

Pulling emotion with demonstrably wrong facts about faith and scripture is one thing. It's manipulation. But for many if it makes them feel good the receipts don't matter. They should. Another example is a man named Ron Wyatt. He was a nurse anesthetist. Also a Christian one day he decided he was going to give himself over to finding artifacts and sites that confirmed

scripture. He made multiple trips to that are of the world and came back with several hundred “discoveries”. He was popular amongst Christians for a time and apologists still quote his work. He passed away at age 66 in 1999.

Here’s the problem. He made a lot of claims. None of them were ever verified. The actual scientists, archaeologists, and Biblical authorities pretty much dismissed his claims because he didn’t present authentic proof. He didn’t produce the receipts.

But many Christians didn’t care. His claims made them feel good. What they wanted to hear he gave them. It didn’t matter that there wasn’t proof. All the proof they needed was that it confirmed what they wanted to believe.

Understand that I’m not saying this disproves the Bible. It just means that Wyatt’s claims hold no genuine weight. Quoting him if someone does their homework actually works the opposite of what is being attempted. It creates doubt rather than offering assurance.

What do the receipts of our faith show? When we take an honest look at who we claim to be in Christ do our lives verify it?

I’ll give a few sample questions, with some follow up options.

“I love scripture.” “How often do you read your Bible? Do you study it or just read it?”

“I value my congregation”. “How much do you attend? Outside of Sunday what else do you do at your church?”

“I wish we had more people here on Sunday”.

How often are you there? I’m there every other month OR I’m there often, I really only miss when I have to.

Do you check in on people you notice are missing? No, I don’t even have a directory OR yes, I know who is around me and if I don’t see them for a bit I give a call.

How do you support things in worship like the nursery or junior church that would make it easier for families with young kids? Oh, I don’t do those things, I’m not cut out for children OR I’m signed up in the rotation.

Keeping it in worship “I’d like to see worship be more exciting or engaging”.

Do you have any ideas? No. OR I have some thoughts about music and maybe order of service. Have you talked to the pastor? No OR yes, I called and we chatted about it.

Are you willing to step into a praise time to change the music? No OR Yes

If No are you willing to seek out from the congregation the folks who might have those gifts? No, I don’t feel comfortable approaching people OR yes, I can ask around and maybe try to put together a sign up sheet or team to sort it out.

Do you think we could drum up the money to hire some musicians? No OR Let me see what I can give and see what other people are able to contribute.

All of these are receipts on some basic things that the majority of churches deal with every week. Do the receipts show actual investment or passive wishing?

In our faith everything falls into this. What do the receipts of our lives show? Do we check them from time to time and see what the tale of our time and energy and action actually reveal about the genuineness of our faith?

Notice in those examples I offered two responses. It wasn’t a criticism. It’s just examples of different kinds of receipts. You are the expert on your own. I’m the expert on mine. It’s the

honesty about them that reveals to us the satisfaction of knowing where we are on point and the truth of where we still need to grow.

In some places we are Paul. In others we are the sons of Sceva. The goal is to be more like Paul, and of course ultimately like Christ.

If we believe there is a reckoning before God one day the receipts matter. This is what we're talking about when folks say we will give an accounting before God. And most would acknowledge that in that moment words matter. If they didn't there wouldn't be an accounting. And those receipts don't earn us salvation but they do reveal if we were really actually saved. And let me be clear. I believe study, being part of a community, worship, and so forth matter. But if all that lip service isn't backed up by how we treat one another it doesn't matter. Just ask Israel in the Old Testament.

Seeing the results of words without receipts with the sons of Sceva was inspiring. It inspired quiet Christians to become bolder and non-Christians to actually start considering faith. Because it proved that the real McCoy had something going on. True faith has power. It has conviction. It blesses others without arrogantly elevating self. For them there was a perceptible reality that a genuine faith, with receipts, makes a difference.

What do your receipts say? What do mine? The great news is that no matter what past receipts demonstrate we can begin any moment putting in the work to acquire evidence of more and more growing and genuine faith and love of God and one another. If we believe in the God revealed in Christ, that's what matters. Those receipts that are here, now, and showing the relationship with Christ that is present and driving forward.

## BIBLE STUDY 2 Timothy 3

### 2 Timothy 3

This chapter finishes out a bulk of the instruction and encouragement to Timothy. There's a smidge in chapter 4 but this is the beginning of the end of the letter.

We see something common in Paul's letters, vice and virtue lists. The first verses would be considered vice lists. They are the things Christians should not do or participate in. The virtues come in verse 10 as the letter turns from those who are problems to the one who is doing well, Timothy. There is a sort of double duty in this list. It both shares qualities that Timothy and other believers should possess and also reminds the struggles and suffering of Paul as an example.

The vices are not describing people outside the church, nor is it forecasting to centuries later (at least not on purpose). They thought the last days were upon them in close proximity. The people described were people in Timothy's own community. And not unbelievers. This was happening inside the church.

We know this because they are said to have a "form of godliness but denying its power." In other words they appeared good and holy on the outside yet never allowed themselves to be truly transformed. What they offer is a false gospel and a faith that is out of bounds while claiming to be good and faithful themselves. Their example is damaging to the community of faith.

They are the “they” that “worms their way into homes”. They deceive people. Imagine being the one tending the home. That’s your job. You’re not terribly educated. There’s only so much to handle in a small home. Likely there was idle time to be had. But no soap operas to watch to pass the time. What to do?

People would go house to house or seek to be invited in to share their ideas, philosophies, religions and such. In Athens were are told in Acts that this was the past time for people, their entertainment. They loved to hear all the ideas coming through. If they were able to charm their way in what was presented was likely a merge of the gospel and other deceptive, shady, immoral ideas. Perhaps even luring the person at home into sinful acts.

The comparison to Jannes and Jambres goes back to Moses when he first approached Pharaoh. He had a few tricks to convince Pharaoh. These two were the sorcerers called up to match Moses trick for trick. While they were able to to an extent, Moses was able to “one up” them. Because their power was false, it was counterfeit.

That is the comparison to these shift “believers” persuading people away from their genuine faith. They might present a form of a gospel, but it’s a fraud. It is counterfeit.

We see this even today. Sadly we see it in churches where someone or a group has a different agenda than the leadership and the church as a whole. They embark on campaigning behind the scenes to stir people up and draw them to something else. Their messaging is presented as “caring” and “trying to be faithful” but is in truth sabotage. We know such because typically the pastor and people in leadership are kept in the dark because otherwise they would step in and engage the situation.

This is where so many church splits happen. The United Methodist Church experienced this in 2024 with the General Conference. The Global Methodist Church formed specifically by employing these kinds of tactics loaded with misinformation, disinformation, and outright lies to pull people into their group. What is written 2000 years ago is sadly still happening today. The gospel is the worse for it.

Sadly the encouragement that people won’t buy the message of the troublemakers is misplaced. If no one was believing them there would have been no need to warn and caution against them. Experience sadly shows that there will always be those who would rather believe the lie over the truth. The hope is that ultimately truth will win out.

Then we get into this final push instructing Timothy. After the list of virtues there is the truth speaking that if Timothy is going to serve he will experience persecution. Meanwhile the people causing problems will continue to do so more and more severely. Knowing this and hearing this from Paul would hopefully strengthen Timothy. Seeing his own life be filled with persecution, sacrifice, and doing without would be hard when he saw the ones stirring things up seeming to thrive and have a better quality of life.

That contrast doesn’t matter. In the end the faithful come out the better for it. Timothy knows that his calling is worth suffering for. Some things are more valuable than silver, gold, and power. These are the things revealed in Jesus.

Part of Timothy’s confidence should come from his reliance on scripture. He has learned them since a small child and they led him to salvation. As the chapter closes, there are some considerations for these last two famous verses.

The scriptures referenced are not the entirety of our Bible. They can't be because the Bible didn't exist. The gospels hadn't been written yet. The other letters were available to the churches they were sent to. They weren't gathered into an authoritative body of work like we have today. Timothy would have largely been familiar with Old Testament scriptures and stories. These are what are being referenced. It is also an affirmation of one interpretation of what the Bible contains, "all things necessary for salvation".

The next piece that is hotly debated is that all scripture is "God breathed" or "inspired". For some this means that the Holy Spirit almost possessed the authors of scripture, therefore the Bible was written indirectly by God. Yet this isn't what is said in the scripture itself.

Others go further saying that it means that because of the inspiration it must be read literally. That it is inerrant and infallible. Yet it makes no claims itself in the scripture. This too is imposed by us as we try to understand the Bible.

The problem is that there is no clear meaning to what is translated to inspired or God breathed. The meaning is something that people have imparted and have disagreed about for a very long time. It is also why there are so many disagreements on interpretations.

A final sense of God breathed is less dogmatic. It refers back to the breath of God in the Old Testament. God's breath was equate with life. So another interpretation is that all scripture is life giving. Which is less specific than some of the other grasps on it.

Whatever you believe, what I find is often glossed over is what follows that expression. And this might be the much more important aspect of the verse. We get not only a statement that indicates the authority of scripture. It also gives as what it is good for and why we use it as such.

It's use is to teach, correct, and train us for righteousness(how to behave properly). Knowing that is what scripture can and should be used for is incredibly important when we interpret. One of the biggest questions rather than quibbling over details(remember last chapter Timothy is told to avoid stupid arguments) we should be asking what is being shown to us regarding values and actions.

Then the "why" is to equip us for good works. The end game of scripture is to guide the deeds of our lives into faithfulness. Our deeds are the fruits of our testimony, the evidence of our faith, and ultimately the greatest example to compel others that this faith we have is worth having.